

# READING FRENCH-CANADIAN BURIAL RECORDS

Canada “How to” Guide, Intermediate: Instruction

August 2016

## GOAL

This guide will teach you to how to extract genealogical information from a French-Canadian burial record by identifying key words and phrases.

## INTRODUCTION

Catholic parish registers are key sources of burial records. Most records are written in French. Early registers may be in Latin, while others are in English. Burial records usually contain:

- Date of burial and/or death
- Name of the deceased
- Occupation, if an adult
- Relationship to parents or spouse
- Age
- Names of witnesses with signatures of the priest and those who could sign

Many French-Canadian records are available online at FamilySearch. The following links will take you to these collections:

**Quebec, Catholic Parish Registers, 1621-1979** (some indexes and images)

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1321742>

You may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [Inserting Special Characters](#)

## HOW TO

To begin your search in death records, it will be helpful if you know the name of the deceased, approximate year of death, and place of death or parish name. Link to Quebec Parish names:

<https://www.genealogiequebec.com/fr/lafrance/carte>

### ***Dit* names**

For French-speaking Canadians, *dit* names (pronounced “dee”) are often part of the surname. For example, Jean Duprés *dit* cultivateur, means Jean Duprés, the farmer. The word *dit* (feminine: *dite*) means “also known as,” from the verb *dire* (to say).

- A *dit* name is an alias added to a family name, and is also called a nickname
- A *dit* name can distinguishes one branch of a family from another, if living in the same town

- *Dit* names can be derived from occupation, town of origin, or physical features
- The same person may use more than one surname combination. For example: Gauthier, Gauthier *dit* Saint-Germaine, Gauthier-Saint-Germain, or Saint-Germain are all surnames for the same person. Sometimes the *dit* name can switch due to changes in a person's life.
- For a *dit* name directory, see <http://www.afgs.org/ditnames/index1.html>

## Key Vocabulary Words:

In many French records, the day, month and year are spelled out. For example: 10 January 1817 translated would be dix janvier mil huit cent dix sept. For help with dates and other words, a French word list can be found at: [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/French\\_Word\\_List](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Word_List). Keep in mind that phrases and even words may be split between two lines. The following words appear most often in burial records. Refer back to this list to find the meaning of key French words.

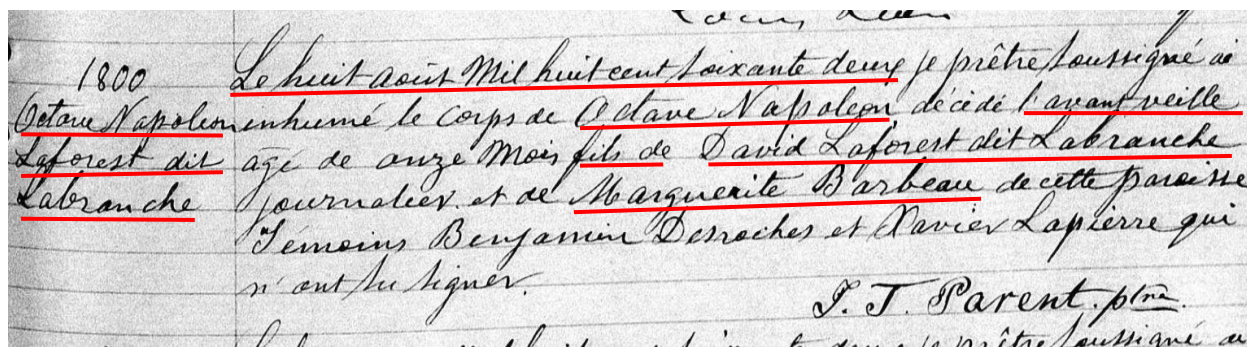
French	English	French	English
a été inhumé	was buried	agé	aged
nous avons inhumé	we have buried	jours	days
dans le cimetière	in the cemetery	mois	months
de cette paroisse	of this parish	ans	years
le corps	the body	environ	approximately
décédé / décédée	died (male / female)	fils / fille de	son / daughter of
mort / morte	died (male / female)	époux / épouse de	husband / wife of
hier	yesterday	journalier	day laborer
la veille	the night before	présens	present
le jour précédent	the day before	avant la veille <u>or</u> avant-hier	the day before yesterday

## Format

Burial records usually follow the same pattern of information. Each priest wrote the name of each subject of the burial record in the margin for quick reference. He sometimes wrote an S for *sépulture* or burial. You may also see the *ans* or years of age listed.

The body of the entry usually contains the date and legal place of the event. The name of the deceased is listed, usually followed by the occupation, residence, and spouse (if married) or parents' names (if an unmarried child). Sometimes burial entries record the date of death or burial and names of any officials and any witnesses with their titles.

**Sample Burial Record.** The following is an example of a French Canadian burial record. Following the image, the entry is written out in French, and then English. Read the questions and **answers** below the translation.



Source: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JDYQ-4XZ>

### French transcription of Burial Record, line by line.

**Margin:** [entry] 1800, Octave Napoleon Laforest dit Labranche [name of the deceased]

Le huit août mil huit cent soixante deux, je prêtre soussigné ai  
inhumé le corps de Octave Napoleon décédé l'avant veille  
agé de onze mois fils de David Laforest dit Labranche  
journalier et de Marguerite Barbeau de cette paroisse  
Témoins Benjamin Desroches et Xavier Lapierre qui  
n'ont su signer

T. J. Parent p<sup>re</sup>

### English transcription of Burial Record, line by line

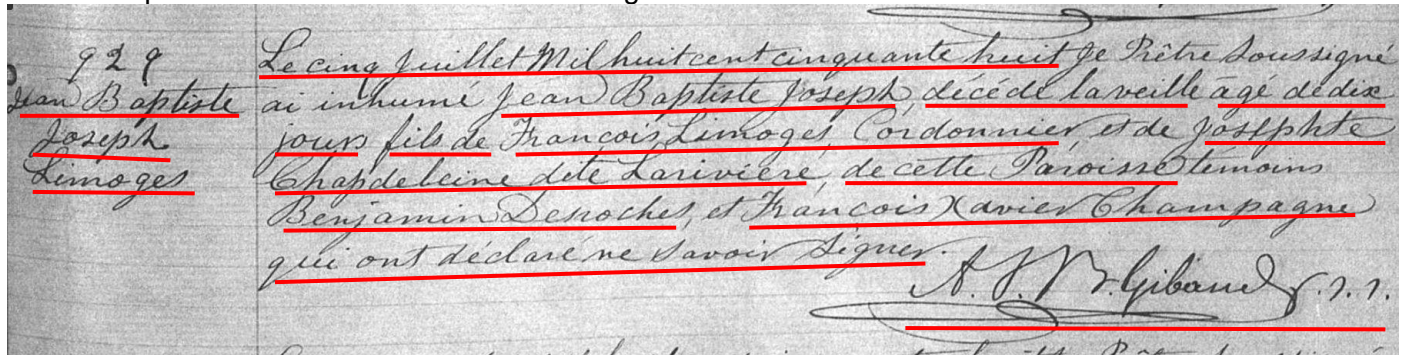
**Margin:** [entry] 1800 - Octave Napoleon Laforest dit Labranche [name of the deceased]

The eighth August one thousand eight hundred sixty-two, I, the undersigned priest have  
buried the body of Octave Napoleon who died the day before yesterday [August 6, 1862].  
aged eleven months son of David Laforest dit Labranche  
day laborer and of Marguerite Barbeau of this parish  
Witnesses Benjamin Desroches and Xavier Lapierre who  
did not know how to sign.

T. J. Parent p<sup>re</sup> [priest]

1. **Who was buried?** Look in the image margin and in line 2 after the words "inhumé le corps de" – **Octave Napoleon Laforest dit Labranche**
2. **What was the date of burial?** Look in line 1 of the image – **Le huit août mil huit cent soixante deux** (The 8th of August, 1862)
3. **When did the person die?** Look in line 2 of the image after the word "décédé" – **l'avant veille** (the day before yesterday, or 6 August 1862)
4. **What was the age of the person who died?** Look in line 3 of the image – **agé de onze mois** (age of 11 months)
5. **Was the deceased male or female?** Look in line 3 of the image – **fils de** (son of)
6. **Who was the father?** Look in line 3 of the image – **David Laforest dit Labranche**
7. **Who was the mother?** Look in line 4 of the image – **Marguerite Barbeau**

**French Burial Record.** Now, try to identify the key words and phrases without a full translation. Read the questions and **answers** below the image.

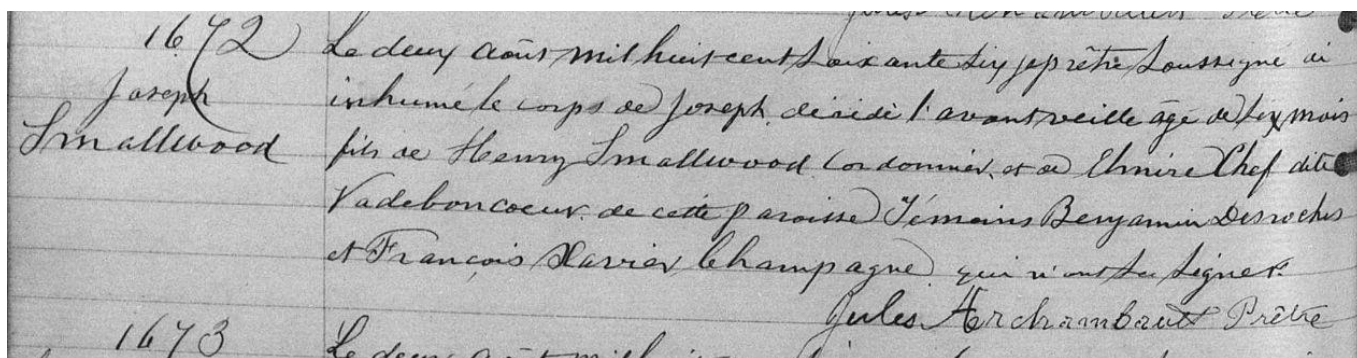


Source: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JDTT-VX2>

1. **Who was buried?** Look in the image margin and in line 2 after the word “inhumé” – **Jean Baptiste Joseph Limoges**
2. **What was the date of burial?** Look in line 1 – **Le cinq Juillet mil huit cent cinquante huit** (5 July 1858)
3. **When did the person die?** Look in line 2 – **décédé la veille** (died the night before, or 4 July 1858)
4. **At what age did the person die?** Look in lines 2 and 3 – **âgé de dix jours** (age ten days)
5. **Was the person male or female?** Look in line 3 – **fils de** (son of)
6. **Who was the father and what was his occupation?** Look in line 3 – **Francois Limoges, Cordonnier** (Francois Limoges, shoemaker)
7. **Who was the mother?** Look in lines 3 and 4 – **Josephite Chapdeleine dite Larivière**
8. **Where was the deceased from?** Look in line 4 – **de cette paroisse** (of this parish)
9. **What was the name of the parish?** Note: The parish name is not in the paragraph, but is found at the beginning of the book and in the indexed record: Nôtre Dame de Montréal, Québec, Canada. To find it, click on the source link below the image.
10. **Who were the witnesses?** Look in line 5 after the word “témoins” – **Benjamin Desrouches**, and **François Xavier Champagne**
11. **Why didn’t the witnesses sign?** Look in line 6 – **qui ont déclaré ne savoir signer** (who said they didn’t know how to sign)
12. **Who was the priest?** Look at the end of the entry – **A J B Gibaud ptr** (priest)

## PRACTICE

Look at the burial record below. Read the questions and look for the **answers** in the image.



Source: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JDYD-1XW>

1. **Who was buried?** – **Joseph Smallwood**
2. **What was the date of burial?** – **Le deux août mil huit cent soixante six** (2 August 1866)
3. **When did the person die?** – **l'avant veille** (day before yesterday, or 31 July 1866)
4. **At what age did the person die?** – **âgé de dix mois** (age of ten months)
5. **Approximately when was the person born?** (calculated September 1865, 10 months before 31 July 1866)
6. **Was the person a son or daughter?** – **fils de** (son of)
7. **Who was the father and what was his occupation?** – **Henry Smallwood, cordonnier** (shoemaker)
8. **Who was the mother?** – **Elmire Chef dite Vadeboncoeur**
9. **Where did the burial occur?** – **de cette paroisse** (of this parish). Note: The parish name is not in the paragraph, but is found at the beginning of the book and in the indexed record: Nôtre Dame de Montréal, Québec, Canada. To find it, click on the source link below the image.

## ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! [Click here](#) to try out the Activity.